

Waterfowl Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
February 22, 2006
Santee Coastal Reserve WMA
McClellanville, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT: Campbell Coxe, Lin Fore, Sam Hiott, Robin Inabinet, Craig LeShack, Phil Wilkinson

MEMBERS ABSENT: Stephen Davis, Tadpole Baldwin, Carlyle Blakeney, Billy Ray Cato, Craig Sasser

DNR STAFF PRESENT: Breck Carmichael, Sam Chapplelear, Bob Joyner, Jim Lee, Bill Mace, Jamie Mills, Elizabeth Vaughn, Jim Westerhold

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike McShane

DNR Board Chair Mike McShane opened the meeting, sitting in for Stephen Davis. McShane stated that he had asked Davis to assist with some ongoing, important discussions between the States of Georgia and South Carolina regarding water issues on the Savannah River. Due to the time commitments involved with that assignment, in addition to Davis' Chairmanship of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory committee and service on the DNR Board, it was felt that appointment of a new chair for the Waterfowl Advisory Committee (WAC) was in order.

McShane commended Davis for his service in chairing the WAC, and announced that Sam Hiott had accepted an appointment to be the new chair.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES OF 11/08/05 MEETING:

The minutes of the November 8, 2005 WAC meeting were approved as submitted, with one correction: In Advisory Committee Comments, reference was made to the DNR staff recommendation for a "sixty-day" season for pintails; it should read "fifty-day" season.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS:

New Chair Sam Hiott stated that he was pleased and honored to assume chairmanship of the Committee. He pledged to keep the Committee on track, and further stated that he feels he can bring the perspective of both the private landowner and the public waterfowl hunter to the table.

Advisory Committee member Coxe stated that it is very important for the WAC to stay focused on the critical issues facing South Carolina's waterfowl resource.

Lin Fore stated that he wished more WAC members had been able to attend the field tours of Samworth and Santee Coastal WMA's the previous day. He said he was quite impressed with the amount of work and progress on habitat improvements on both areas.

Phil Wilkinson seconded Fore's statement, saying he had stayed in touch with the progress being made and was quite satisfied.

Advisory Committee member Craig LeShack of Ducks Unlimited (DU) noted that DU will be partnering with the DNR on several small North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants to assist with habitat work.

Mike McShane stated that he would like to see the peer review process on DNR's waterfowl management areas continue, and that it is important to establish the expectations, process and format for the reviews up front.

CONSTITUENT COMMENTS:

There were no constituent comments.

2005-06 WATERFOWL WMA HUNT RESULTS

DNR Deputy Director Carmichael distributed handouts containing the final WMA waterfowl hunt results, and results of the WMA Youth Waterfowl Hunts (copies attached). Discussion then ensued concerning the importance of the youth hunts, whether they could be expanded, and whether they could be scheduled earlier in the duck season. Carmichael stated staff would look at all options as soon as the federal frameworks for 2006-07 were known.

There was also discussion on youth recruitment, and whether the Hunter Safety course requirements might be a barrier to recruiting young hunters. It was noted that a number of states have developed "Apprentice Hunter" programs whereby youth can hunt with properly licensed and hunter safety certified adults on a trial-basis, then take hunter safety classes if they want to further their hunting development.

NATIONAL DUCK HUNTER SURVEY:

Carmichael distributed copies of a news release announcing the availability of the results of a National Duck Hunter Survey, conducted by the National Fly Council and the Wildlife Management Institute (copy attached).

WAC MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

Due to time limitations and absence of a full Committee attendance, this discussion was deferred to the May meeting. However it was noted that there are several examples of positive accomplishments that have already been made towards the Committee's Mission and Goals. Lin Fore commented that information gained from the Peer Reviews of DNR's managed impoundments are aiding in significant habitat improvements on several areas. Hunting opportunities have been expanded at Santee Coastal and Samworth, and a proposal to limit disturbance in Carr and Little Carr Creeks adjacent to Samworth is moving forward. Additionally dialogue between the waterfowl constituency and the DNR has expanded and improved.

OTHER OLD AND/OR NEW BUSINESS:

Advisory Committee member Inabinet asked that the Committee again consider a reduced mallard season in South Carolina. It was noted that the WAC can make any recommendation for which there is majority concurrence to the DNR Board for consideration, but in the past there had been no consensus within the WAC for a reduced season on mallards.

Inabinet asked DNR staff if it would be possible to initiate discussions with Santee Cooper about placing Sparkleberry Swamp in the WMA program, and establishing 1,000 acres of the property as waterfowl sanctuary. He also asked what had become of a proposed waterfowl habitat project on Manchester State Forest, and whether the DNR could provide any assistance to the Fish and Wildlife Service in restoring waterfowl habitat at Santee Refuge. Carmichael stated he would have the appropriate Wildlife Section staff contact Inabinet to discuss these issues.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

May 9, 2006, 12:00 noon, Rembert Dennis Building, Columbia.